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LB 305, 715

with at that time, which did not entail a tax increase on the people of Nebraska, was LB 715. I passed out the other day when we were on General File for LB 305 some paperwork which showed a comparison between the wages of the average teacher in Nebraska and the average worker's wage in the state of Nebraska. Teachers are exceeding the average wage in Nebraska by 40 percent. Now I'm not saying the teachers are overpaid because I don't believe they are. But the truth is that our average worker is not overpaid as well. They are underpaid on a national scale, and before I could ask those workers who are underpaid to come up with a tax increase, I had to look within our budget and see if there were some way...there was some way that I could redirect current resources to meet the needs of teachers. When you have limited resources, you look for the particular issues which are of greatest impact. If you have a leaky roof, you fix that first before you put down new carpet, and so I looked at what the teachers were telling us, and they were telling us, first of all, the starting wage was extremely low and, second, they were telling us that there were shortage areas. And so LB 715 was my attempt to address those two issues. LB 715 was geared to teachers who are coming into the classroom in the shortage areas only because those are the areas where we are finding...our administrators are finding very difficult to fill, and they need to have the flexibility to come up with more funds to offer to those students that are graduating from educational institutions if they're going to compete in the marketplace against other states. And so LB 715 proposed a hiring bonus, if you will, of \$1,500 a year for the first three years. Now why was it \$1,500? Well, that was arbitrary but I was trying to come up with something that fit within the resources that we had in the state, within the education earmarked funds that we had in our state because we know that 50 percent of our budget now, at the state level, is spent on education, and I couldn't rob the health needs and the other needs of the people in our state just for this one segment of our budget. So when I looked at it, I proposed \$1,500 a year for three years. Those first three years are very difficult for a teacher. They come out of college. They often have school loans to pay off and the loan forgiveness program, which Senator Thompson passed last year and I wholeheartedly support, will, in fact, only help encourage people to go into education colleges